

And so if we ought to think of one thing we can honor John Conyers for, thinking about what he stood for in South Africa, think about the record he stood for on civil rights at home, what he's fought for on the Judiciary Committee—it ought to be the idea that America ought to be a good place and a safe place and a full place for all its children.

Yesterday—I will tell you this story in closing. I want to tell you a story. Yesterday, at the request of the Senators from North Dakota and Senator Daschle and Senator Baucus, I had a fascinating meeting with 19 tribal chiefs from the 19 Indian tribes of the High Plains, the Northern High Plains in America. And all of you who don't know about that part of the country need to know that notwithstanding all the things you read about how rich the Native Americans are because of their gambling enterprises today, the tribes that don't have those gambling enterprises and the tribes that are in the poor, rural areas, a long way from economic activity, are still the poorest people in America.

And so these very dignified, mostly pretty young tribal leaders, men and women, came in; we sat in a circle, according to their request, in the Roosevelt Room in the White House; and they spoke in their turn about the needs of their people. And then after they had done that, the person whom they had designated to be their spokesperson stood up in a very dignified way and said, "Mr. President, we have something to say about our involvement in Kosovo. We know something about ethnic cleansing. We were removed from our lands, and some of the people who did it said that it was God's will, which we hear in the Balkans. And we have seen America come a very long way. And we have signed this proclamation to tell you that we, the leaders of the first Americans, support America's policy to stand up against ethnic cleansing and the murder of people because of their religious and ethnic background."

And then another man said, "I would like to be heard." And this young man stood up with great dignity, and he had a beautiful silver Indian necklace on. And he said this—he said, "Mr. President, I had two uncles. One landed on the beaches at Normandy on D-Day; the other was the very first Native

American fighter pilot in the history of the American military. My great-great-grandfather was slaughtered by the 7th Cavalry at Wounded Knee." He said, "I now have only one son. America has come a very long way from Wounded Knee, to the beaches at Normandy, to the opportunity I have to be in the White House today. And I love my son more than anything, but if he needed to go and fight against ethnic cleansing and the brutality and the murdering of people because of their race or their ethnicity or their religion, I would be proud for him to stand for the United States and for the humanity of man."

No one in the room could breathe, we were so moved by this man in his simple dignity, representing Americans who still don't have a total, fair shot at educational and economic opportunities, who live in places that still don't have adequate health care. But he told a story that needs to be told.

So I say to you, you honor John Conyers tonight—the best way we can honor John Conyers is to say, we've got a pretty picture of the 21st century, and we've got an ugly picture of the 21st century that is every last nightmare that has dogged human society since people came up out of the caves and first got together, and that is fear and hatred of people who are different from us. And we're better than that. And he's helped us to be better than that. And we're going to do better still.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 p.m. at the BET on Jazz Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Robert L. Johnson, chairman and chief executive officer, BET Holdings, Inc.; musicians Kenny Burrell, Donald Byrd, and James Moody; Debbie Dingell, wife of Representative John Dingell; and civil rights activist Dick Gregory.

Remarks on Departure for Seattle, Washington

May 14, 1999

Senate Action on Gun Control Legislation

Good morning. It is now clear that the tragedy at Littleton has helped to create a broad national consensus that we must act

together to protect our children from violence, including taking efforts to keep guns away from children and away from criminals. The question is whether Congress will write that national consensus into law or block it. Thus far, the Senate has not fully lived up to its responsibility.

I am very pleased that on Wednesday a bipartisan majority in the Senate passed two important measures I proposed 2 weeks ago. First, they agreed to ban the import of high-capacity ammunition clips that are used to evade the 1994 ban on assault weapons. Second, they agreed to ban juvenile possession of semi-automatic assault weapons and large-capacity magazines, weapons used—designed only for mayhem. There's no good reason for a child to own an AK-47 or a 15-round ammo clip.

I applaud the Senate for taking these two steps. However, on Wednesday a narrow majority squandered an important opportunity to close the gun show loophole through which tens of thousands of guns are sold each year without background checks. Yesterday I called on the Senate to reconsider that vote. It makes no sense to let criminals continue to use legitimate gun shows as a convenience store for their weapons.

Today the Senate will vote again on a measure purporting to address this issue. However, the new Senate Republican bill is still riddled with high-caliber loopholes. It won't stop criminals from buying guns at gun shows. At the same time, it will open up a new pawn shop loophole that lets convicted felons get guns at a local pawn shop. That's actually worse than current law.

I simply can't believe the Senate will make the same mistake twice. So once again, I ask them to reject this phony proposal and to pass real legislation that requires the background checks necessary to prevent criminals from buying guns at gun shows which they cannot buy at gun stores. This should be a moment for national unity.

I was so pleased today to receive a letter from the major gun manufacturers reiterating their support for our efforts to pass real, enforceable, mandatory background checks at gun shows. They recognize that law-abiding citizens don't need a gun show loophole, only criminals do.

For 6 years, we have made strong, steady progress against crime by elevating results over ideology. Today we have a chance to put aside partisanship, political divisions, and draw special interest power that has dominated our politics on this issue for too long. For the sake of our children, I hope the Senate changes its mind and does the right thing.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 a.m. in the South Portico at the White House.

Remarks in a Telephone Conversation With Americans at Camp Hope, Albania

May 14, 1999

Maj. Gen. William Hinton. Hello, Mr. President. This is General Bill Hinton from Camp Hope in Albania.

The President. Hi, General Hinton. And are you there with Mr. Sykes?

Maj. Gen. Hinton. Yes, Mr. Chris Sykes is here with me from CARE.

The President. Well, first of all, I just wanted to call to applaud your efforts in building and managing Camp Hope. I think it's a very important example of our commitment to give shelter and assistance to the refugees until they can go home. And I'm very proud you were able to do it in such a short time. I know you had a lot of constraints finding the right site and getting the infrastructure up. I think this will help us to get our NATO Allies to do more on other camps as well.

How are you doing with the rest of the work there?

Maj. Gen. Hinton. Sir, the work is coming along very well. We're progressing with the rest of the camp, and we hope to complete the camp for up to 20,000—

[At this point, the telephone connection was interrupted.]

Maj. Gen. Hinton. —hello, Mr. President. Are you there?

The President. Yes.

Maj. Gen. Hinton. In any case, we hope to complete the rest of the camp by the first of June.